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By: Lt. Bernie Kale

168th Air Refueling Wing refuel aircraft during strike exercise

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – Alaska Air National Guardsmen with the 168th Air Refueling Wing participated in a nation-wide joint exercise aimed at validating long-range capabilities of several Air Force bombers and fighters April 4.

Dubbed Operation Chimichanga, KC-135 Stratotankers from the 168th Air Refueling Wing, F-16 Aggressor aircraft from Misawa Air Base, Japan, B-1 bombers from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., and the F-22 Raptor and E-3 Sentry assigned to the 3rd Wing at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) participated in the U.S. Strategic Command operation.

Personnel operated F-22s, KC-135s and F-16s out of Eielson Air Force Base, while E-3s and additional F-16s supported the exercise from JBER. The B-1 bombers participating in the long range strike exercise flew a 10-hour round trip mission from Ellsworth to strike their targets just east of Eielson. This exercise allowed the various aircraft to work together in a simulated strike environment to practice interoperability while simultaneously traveling long distances and receiving air refueling support.

"We had our KC-135 tankers up in the air refueling the aircraft involved in the exercise," said Maj. Scott Lanis, 168th Operations Group chief of scheduling. "Within seven hours of flight time, we offloaded 147,000 pounds of fuel."

The operation was conducted on the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex near Eielson Air Force Base. The 65,000-square mile air space provides a diverse training environment, allowing pilots to train realistically and jointly in situations similar to what they'll face in combat. The operation involved numerous commands and went smoothly, according to Lanis.

"This was a total force operation with commands from Alaska all the way down to the lower-48," Lanis said. "We were prepared and worked seamlessly with everyone to make this an all-around successful exercise."

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Cutlines:

Flightline Eielson: F-22 Raptors from the 90th Fighter Squadron at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson prepare to take off from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, April 4. The Raptors were participating in Operation Chimichanga, a long range strike exercise over the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex. (Courtesy photo)

B1 Takeoff: A B-1 bomber assigned to the 37th Bomb Squadron rumbles off the flightline at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., April 4 as part of a combat training mission over Fort Yukon, Alaska. The purpose of the exercise is to flex all major muscle movements during the planning and executing phase of a long range strike. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Hrair H. Palyan/Released)